

# 不悟

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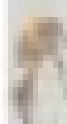
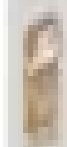
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# Unrepentant - Chapter 01-03

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# Chapter 1

## Chapter 1 ... A Ghost Returns, Returns to Her True Home

Gu Hong Jian opened her eyes to a somewhat familiar yet strange scene.

While not particularly well-lit, the study was peaceful. On a [Huanghuali](#) desk was a messily arranged pile of imperial reports. On the wall above the desk and chair was a plaque engraved with the words “Wen Dao Tang.” These three characters were written vigorously and powerfully, with a very natural and flowing style of calligraphy. In fact, it looked as if it had been written personally by the current Emperor of Tianmin Country, Lin Si Ze; although, it was actually Gu Hong Jian who held the knife and carved each stroke.

This was Wen Dao Tang. Although seemingly a common yet elegant study, in fact it was Lin Si Ze’s imperial study.

Why— why was she, Gu Hong Jian, here?

Gu Hong Jian must be in Chi Imperial Palace. Extremely far away from the capital, in the Hu prefecture, she and the famous general from the Gang and Ji vassal states, Baili Cen, fought hand to hand. Although many of Tianmin Country’s officers and soldiers had succeeded in carrying out the assignment, trials and tribulations had fallen down upon the Hu prefecture. Fighting hand to hand with Baili Cen, Gu Hong Jian simply didn’t have any stratagem that ensured him successfully being defeated – Baili Cen had dismounted her from her horse by striking her with his lance. After that, in pursuit, his lance pierced her stomach. She then lost consciousness.

Baili Cen was no rookie; he was a rather young yet seasoned general. He knew exactly how to take advantage of the situation. Thus, the instant Gu Hong Jian was thrown to the ground from her horse, she became aware of her inevitable death.

To be more accurate, when Gu Hong Jian had left the capital with 50,000 troops and horses to seize Hu prefecture three months ago, she already knew she was going to die.

So what was going on?

Not only was she not dead, but she also appeared a thousand miles away, in Lin Si Ze's study...?

Gu Hong Jian wrinkled her brows, looking extremely puzzled, and took two steps forward, only to discover that her body seemed as light as willow catkins. She merely thought of where she wanted to move before instantly appearing in Lin Si Ze's resting area.

Unexpectedly, Lin Si Ze was there.

He appeared somewhat fatigued. Leaning atop the soft couch with his eyes closed, faint black circles could be seen beneath his eyes. His left hand clenched an imperial report.

Even though he currently appeared very exhausted, he was still, as always, extremely handsome. Because his eyes were closed, those long, curled eyelashes could clearly be seen. They fluttered like butterfly wings in the wake of his light breathing. The outer corners of his eyes were slightly curved upwards. He appeared to be a gentle and sincere man who could look straight into a person's soul and steal their heart. But if angered, he would send cold and detached looks toward others, making them feel as if they had fallen into an icehouse.

Gu Hong Jian was aware of this after having been on the receiving end of these two types of looks.

But now he quietly slept, his brilliantly bright eyes hidden. He actually appeared very meek.

With a very high straight nose, rather thin, pale lips, and compared to Gu Hong Jian who was constantly on the move all year round, flawless, fair skin...

He appeared to be a picturesque sleeping beauty.

But Gu Hong Jian was not in the mood to appreciate his beauty, because she urgently wanted to know what happened. Thereupon, she once again "walked" towards Lin Si Ze's side and reached a hand out to shake Lin Si Ze awake.

Lin Si Ze loathed people waking him up from his sleep. If he was indeed

extremely exhausted and woken up for an insignificant affair, he would be angry. But Gu Hong Jian was always fearless, and it was her speciality, of course, to provoke Lin Si Ze's loathing and annoyance.

But for the first time, she failed.

She saw her hand pass through Lin Si Ze's shoulder. Even after her hand passed through his shoulder, Lin Si Ze continued to lie down, having not received any disturbance and thus still sleeping heavily.

Gu Hong Jian blinked. Withdrawing her hand, she repeated her motions.

To no surprise, her hand passed through Lin Si Ze's body once again.

She couldn't awake Lin Si Ze, but it didn't matter because it was all very obvious.

She did indeed die, but she had also become a ghost.

Gu Hong Jian remembered reading a saying before — — *a ghost returns, returns to her true home*.

In other words, a ghost actually "returns" after their death to the place that was truly their home.

But, her home, could it possibly be Lin Si Ze?

ღღღ

Gu Hong Jian somewhat anxiously looked at Lin Si Ze.

If Lin Si Ze knew she was floating beside him, how would he react?

— — Gu Hong Jian had already confirmed her death. She was really floating, her two feet not touching the ground. She had no need to do so. By merely thinking of where she wanted to go, she could float there on the wind.

If Lin Si Ze already knew of her death, as well as her posthumous transformation into a ghost staying by his side, he would certainly declare with a dark face, "The influence still lingers on." [1](#)

To be frank, Gu Hong Jian also thought it was awfully preposterous.

She knew her feelings for Lin Si Ze were very deep. After all, over the twenty years in which she had grown from an ignorant girl to a high-ranking military officer, all of her beauty and suffering had been given to her by Lin Si Ze throughout her entire life. All her love and hate had been given to Lin Si Ze as well.

But she already knew that this was only for this life, that was all.

Once she died, drank Meng Po's<sup>2</sup> soup, and crossed the Nai He bridge<sup>3</sup>, her next life would reap the karma from her last life.<sup>4</sup> In addition, following Lin Si Ze wouldn't matter.

But it didn't occur to Gu Hong Jian that her deep feelings for Lin Si Ze could turn her into a ghost, thus continuing to drift by Lin Si Ze's side.

Faithful even in death, that basically described her.

With this kind of faithfulness after death, regardless of her or Lin Si Ze's perspectives, nothing good would come of this.

Gu Hong Jian looked at Lin Si Ze, suddenly a little broken-hearted.

Did Lin Si Ze know that she, as always, completed his orders?

Did Lin Si Ze know that it only took her two months to attack the impregnable Hu prefecture, thereby dealing a heavy blow to the Ji vassal state?

Did Lin Si Ze know that she paid this price with her life?

Gu Hong Jian couldn't decide, because she believed that even if Lin Si Ze knew she had died, he could still sleep as heavily as this.

Before, she and Lin Si Ze had an extremely intense quarrel. Gu Hong Jian had said, "If I become a ghost, it would be unlikely for me to let you off." These angry words were definitely said in the moment of anger, yet these angry words had become reality. Gu Hong Jian felt a bit helpless.

Even though she had become a ghost, she couldn't do anything. If she could, she would ruthlessly slap Lin Si Ze a dozen times or perhaps use a writing brush to draw a tortoise on his face.<sup>5</sup> Maybe she could straight-out kill him and make him accompany her in death. She now couldn't touch anyone nor control anything. Compared to other people who were simply better off...



Gu Hong Jian, bored to death, walked away, wanting to know what the date was. Luckily on the desk, an imperial report was actually unfolded. Lin Si Ze must have just finished as the date was clearly written on the bottom — 7th Year of Píngchāng, September 14.

The day that Gu Hong Jian died was September 13...

So, she had just died, less than a day ago, yet she had hurriedly returned to the capital?

This heart could move heaven and earth!

Only, if it was like this, she was afraid that Lin Si Ze still didn't know anything.

Even if the best horses were used to return as fast as possible the entire trip and if they didn't stop for a rest to exchange men and horses at each relay station, it would still take at least seven days for the news of the victory at Hu prefecture to arrive at the capital. In other words, it would still take six more days for Lin Si Ze to become aware of Gu Hong Jian's death.

Gu Hong Jian shook her head and thought of leaving Wen Dao Tang. When she walked to the gate, however, it seemed as if there was an invisible wall blocking her path. She was completely unable to continue walking. She could even see through the gaps in the gate the outer Imperial bodyguards, palace maids, and inner supervisors, but unfortunately she couldn't go outside.

Vile...

Gu Hong Jian floated back to Lin Si Ze's side, knowing for certain that she couldn't escape from her responsibility to this guy.

Did she really like him this much?

Like him enough to change into a ghost to stick by his side...Hey!

Maybe she was still like herself and still wanted to love this man.

Gu Hong Jian stood there, but Lin Si Ze slightly stirred. He then slowly opened his eyes.

Within his eyes was an extremely rare confused and blank expression, completely different from when he was clear-headed.

Lin Si Ze wrinkled his brows and closed his eyes, reaching up with his hand to pinch the bridge of his nose. He once again opened his eyes and the expression within his eyes became as sharp and serene as in the past. Like a deep lake, people completely couldn't fathom what he was thinking when all was said and done.

Gu Hong Jian jumped in front of him for a little while, wanting to test if he could see her or not.

And without a doubt, Lin Si Ze was simply unable to see her. Merely standing up from the soft couch, his hand still holding the imperial report, he directly passed through the still bouncing Gu Hong Jian.

Gu Hong Jian, somewhat dissatisfied, curled her lips and followed Lin Si Ze. She watched him move the screen aside and exit. Outside, Lin Si Ze's inner servant Jiang Hai Fu heard the sound of Lin Si Ze's footsteps. Thus, he inquired, "Your majesty, you have awoken?"

Although Jiang Hai Fu was an old-fashioned name, he was actually a very young palace eunuch. Despite his delicate appearance, he was fond of acting mature. He had already been following Lin Si Ze when he'd ascended the throne. After several years, he could very clearly grasp Lin Si Ze's preferences.

Lin Si Ze grunted nonverbally. Jiang Hai Fu then instructed the palace maid to go prepare and fetch hot water for Lin Si Ze to wash his face.

"Bah! You still get to live comfortably while I was in the Hu prefecture – that damnable place. I am a woman, yet I couldn't bathe for quite a while. My body smelled awful..."

Gu Hong Jian floated in front of Lin Si Ze. Putting on an act, she reached out to slap his face a few times. Of course, in reality her hand phased through Lin Si Ze's face as light as a feather. In this lifetime, Gu Hong Jian actually wasn't allowed to strike Lin Si Ze repeatedly, but now she could punch and kick him like this as she pleased. Although she was only amusing herself, it was enough to satisfy her.

Lin Si Ze looked pensive as he sat in his chair for a while. All of a sudden, he spoke up, "Jiang Hai Fu."

Jiang Hai Fu immediately responded, "What is your majesty's command?"

"Today...has the news from Hu prefecture arrived yet?"

Lin Si Ze indifferently asked.

Gu Hong Jian couldn't help lowering her clenched fist.

Jiang Hai Fu stared blankly before immediately shaking his head. "No...the latest news was from ten days ago which reported that Assistant Minister Gu has already figured out a method to attack Hu prefecture and to force Baili Cen to surrender."

Lin Si Ze grunted. "En."

"Your majesty...are you worried about Assistant Minister Gu?" Jiang Hai Fu very carefully inquired.

Gu Hong Jian also fixed her attention on Lin Si Ze.

But listening to this inquiry, Lin Si Ze coldly snorted. "If she said she had a method, then she should be able to seize Hu prefecture. She has always been deceitful in many ways. And then there are her martial arts for her to rely on. I worry about what she will do."

Jiang Hai Fu nodded without delay. "Saying this, Assistant Minister Gu is surely safe and sound."

Deceitful in many ways?

Gu Hong Jian didn't know whether to laugh or cry. Kicking Lin Si Ze with both of her feet, her shoe sliced right through that handsome face of his. A bit of her anger emerged from her heart.

Although she knew long ago that this man's heart was definitely nothing good, hearing the cutthroat description "deceitful in many ways" still made her heart inevitably depressed.

Deceitful in many ways, when had she used a trick on him?

Every time she had done so was for him to harm others, all right?!

Fine, her justification wasn't exactly acceptable...

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1. (literal meaning: the soul of a deceased has not yet dispersed) [↩](#)
2. (Meng Po is the Lady of Forgetfulness, tasked to ensure that souls are ready to be reincarnated without remembering their previous life or afterlife) [↩](#)
3. (Nai River bridge is also known as the river of Lethe or the Sanzu river and is the entrance to the Underworld.) [↩](#)
4. (当牛当马当人 literally translates to when cow when horse when human. This phrase comes from Buddhism. It describes using the next life to repay for their good deeds.) [↩](#)
5. (An all-around insult, Gu Hong Jian could be implying that Lin Si Ze is a coward, is infertile, has slow-moving sperm, has wronged her, etc. Anyway, she's insulting him.) [↩](#)

## Chapter 2

### Chapter 2 ... The difference between heaven and earth was just like that.

Gu Hong Jian had ample resentment towards him. At this point, she wanted to stay at Wen Dao Tang, but when Lin Si Ze went on a walk for a while, she was immediately dragged outside by their bond as well. Forced against her will, she followed Lin Si Ze. Lin Si Ze sat in a huge chariot, and she floated beside him like a kite.

He Fang Ning had already heard the cries of “the emperor’s chariot approaches.” Thus, she had already completely attired herself in light white muslin and was kneeling outside Zi Yun Palace to wait respectfully for the holy chariot. Seeing Lin Si Ze arrive, she humbly lifted her eyes before then greeting softly, “*Your majesty.*” Frankly speaking, it made one softhearted.

And Gu Hong Jian watched attentively with a sneer on her face.

He Fang Ning... her face didn’t seem to extremely resemble a certain person.... humph!

Lin Si Ze appeared and slightly frowned. Advancing to help her stand up, he said, “The weather is so cold, why are you wearing so little?”

Although his facial expression was still apathetic, his voice still sounded somewhat concerned.

“Because *chén qiè*<sup>1</sup> remembered that your majesty loves it the most when *chén qiè* wears white clothes. So *chén qiè* was anxiously waiting upon your majesty’s return...cough...” While He Fang Ning spoke, she gave a few faint coughs. Lin Si Ze then simply pulled her hand and lead her directly inside Zi Yun Palace.

He Fang Ning glanced at Lin Si Ze as he pulled her hand and revealed a shy expression. The deathly white face that was a result of the cold also flushed red.

Gu Hong Jian simply sneered.

It was now just entering autumn which was indeed not regarded warm, but the palace interior's high walls stood tall. With such little wind, where could the chill go?

When she was in Hu prefecture, even though it was July-August, it was still a world of ice and snow and very arid. The chilly wind, like countless barbs, scraped against them and made people's cold skin painfully raw. The first day Gu Hong Jian arrived in Hu prefecture, she woke up at midnight to find her face bloody. It wasn't because of him; it was bleeding because her lip was excessively chapped.

The next day, she caught a common cold. Since many of the officers and soldiers didn't particularly welcome her at first, she didn't dare to speak of her cold. Instead, she firmly carried on, ignoring the burden, and acted as if nothing was troubling her in order to demonstrate her tenacity to those officers and soldiers. When everyone was shivering from the cold, she even intentionally wore thin clothes to practice in this world of ice and snow. Although she won a lot of respectful looks, she also caused the cold to become even more severe, almost developing into tuberculosis.

In short, she endured all sorts of suffering. As a child, Gu Hong Jian hadn't been taken care of well, so she wasn't afraid of suffering hardships. She was only afraid of death. After dying, everything would truly be over.

Even though she wasn't afraid of suffering hardships, it didn't mean that she was accustomed to suffering. Furthermore, it didn't mean she wished to suffer on her own; she wanted someone to come and pamper her when she was suffering.

Unfortunately, however, she had died in a region like the Hu prefecture, without Lin Si Ze knowing anything about it. But inside this high-walled, warm Palace, he was concerned about He Fang Ning who hadn't even caught a cold.

The difference between heaven and earth was just like that.

In fact, it wasn't that Lin Si Ze hadn't treated her well. He had treated her well; there were simply no words for just how well he had treated her back when he cared for her. But that was already an awfully long time ago, a previous matter that Gu Hong Jian had already long forgotten about...

Gu Hong Jian was just about to recall it, but she suddenly returned to her senses only to find herself already within Zi Yun Palace. Lin Si Ze and He Fang Ning sat very close, the latter having put on thicker clothing. But, He Fang Ning still seemed very cold. Whether intentionally or not, she leaned into Lin Si Ze who didn't take note of it and merely stared straight ahead as if he was lost in thought.

Lin Si Ze could unexpectedly become lost in thought...

This was also truly strange.

When he and Gu Hong Jian were together, Lin Si Ze would only glare at her with those infuriating eyes, as if he wanted to kill her at any time. There wasn't a moment of peace or relaxation. When he was together with He Fang Ning, however, he could actually appear to be very relaxed and happy, as if he was incredibly comfortable, and becoming lost in thought...

He Fang Ning was also a bit surprised. She tried to gently pull Lin Si Ze's sleeve and whispered, "Your majesty?"

Lin Si Ze withdrew his gaze, looked at her, and said, "Huh?"

He Fang Ning replied, "Your majesty...you seem distracted. Is something on your mind?"

Lin Si Ze paused before shaking his head. "It's nothing. I'm just a bit tired."

He Fang Ning somewhat shyly lowered her head, her lips curving up into a smile. She said, "Then, your majesty, how about a break..."

Lin Si Ze nodded. "En."

Gu Hong Jian was getting a bit hysterical—she wouldn't have to stay here and watch Lin Si Ze fondle He Fang Ning, would she?!

Knowing was one thing, but seeing it with her own eyes was a completely different matter.

She could only hope that Lin Si Ze would remember to lay down the bed sheets...

Unexpectedly, however, Lin Si Ze stood up and said, "Then I'll go back to the Palace. *Níng Fēi*<sup>2</sup>, your body is unwell. Go rest properly."

He Fang Ning's complexion turned dark. She said, "*Your majesty? Chén qiè —chén qiè's body, there is nothing wrong with it...*"

"You appear to have caught a cold. Weren't you coughing a little? I'll have the imperial physician come take a look at you in a bit."

Lin Si Ze didn't say anymore and immediately left, leaving only the dumbfounded He Fang Ning sitting on the chair alone. After quite a while, she thought of escorting Lin Si Ze back, only to be cast away by Lin Si Ze who was worried about her health.

When Gu Hong Jian saw He Fang Ning's practically twisted face, she almost laughed out loud.

She could be considered to be thoroughly schooled in what it meant to drop a boulder on one's foot...

*That's what you get for acting so pitiful!*

Gu Hong Jian was in a good mood as she followed closely behind Lin Si Ze. The connection pulled her out of Zi Yun Palace. Jian Hai Fu inquired, "*Your majesty, do you wish to return to Zhang Qian Palace?*"

Lin Si Ze contemplated for a moment before saying, "No...go to Zhao Hong Palace."

Gu Hong Jian froze instantly, blank.

Zhao Hong Palace?

Wasn't that her imperial palace residence?

Although...she had only lived there for a short period of 2-3 years.

Why would Lin Si Ze want to go to Zhao Hong Palace?

Did he miss her?

Although Gu Hong Jian was already a ghost, for a moment, she completely understood what it meant to be "floating on air". Her whole body was trembling slightly and she couldn't suppress her smile as she floated by Lin Si Ze's side towards Zhao Hong Palace.

She hadn't lived in Zhao Hong Palace for at least half a year. Since that large



quarrel she had with Lin Si Ze, where he had driven her out of Zhao Hong Palace, she had not returned even once. Xiang Jun was Zhao Hong Palace's head palace maid, but even though Zhao Hong Palace was absolutely empty, Lin Si Ze wouldn't allow the maids to leave to serve in the other palaces. They could only guard the absolutely empty Zhao Hong Palace.

At present, under the dim light of the darkened night, the moon shrouded everything in a layer of light silk, hazily streaking across the sky and sprinkling down very faint moonlight. Zhao Hong Palace looked especially cold and cheerless from this. The trees' shadows were vague, and the breeze occasionally blew through, giving off a somewhat haunted atmosphere.

Lin Si Ze descended from his huge chariot, entering with Jiang Hai Fu following silently. He expected that this imperial palace would already be lifeless, but to his surprise there was still a small palace maid holding a broom and sweeping the floor.

Jiang Hai Fu wrinkled his brows——the sky was already dark, why was she sweeping?

Lin Si Ze took note of this at last and slightly paused. Jiang Hai Fu hurriedly said, "Hello. Which palace's maid are you? Why are you here in the middle of the night, sweeping the floor?"

That small palace maid turned her head, the moonlight illuminating her face. At last, her face was visible; it was Gu Hong Jian's small maid, Xiang Jun.

Xiang Jun probably hadn't anticipated them coming at this moment, so she was startled. As Lin Si Ze's body was hidden within the trees' shadows, Xiang Jun didn't see him. She stared blankly before replying, "House Steward Jiang? Why have you come here? Does the emperor have an order? Or, or is Gu *dà ren*<sup>3</sup> returning?!"

Jiang Hai Fu saw that Lin Si Ze didn't speak up, still keeping silent. Mentally realizing this, he easily said, "The emperor has ordered nothing. I'm just casually visiting to have a look. Actually you... Xiang Jun, why are you sweeping the ground this late at night?"

When Lin Si Ze and Gu Hong Jian were quite passionate and sweet

together, the former visited Zhao Hong Palace frequently. In addition, Xiang Jun was Gu Hong Jian's personal maid, so Jiang Hai Fu had naturally recognized her.

Xiang Jun glanced down at the broom in her hand and exclaimed, "I can't sleep. With nothing to do, I got up to sweep the floor."

Jiang Hai Fu didn't know whether to laugh or cry. "How do you have this kind of tiring life. You are a head palace maid, and yet you are still using a broom?"

"Habit. Before, when Gu *dà ren* was still living in Zhao Hong Palace, Gu *dà ren* would frequently be unable to sleep at night if the emperor didn't visit. She would practice martial arts in the courtyard. I would hold the broom and sweep behind her as she chopped down flowers carelessly."

Jiang Hai Fu paused before commenting, "Oh..."

He didn't know how to respond to that properly.

As for the emperor's thoughts, Jiang Hai Fu really couldn't figure them out. He also didn't know why Lin Si Ze was hiding in the trees' shadows, eavesdropping on him and this small palace maid's conversation on this topic.

Jiang Hai Fu felt as if his head could explode. He didn't know whether this conversation should continue. He was afraid the emperor would be unhappy if he were to stop his questioning, yet he was afraid to ask more in case the emperor actually didn't want to hear more...

But seeing as how Lin Si Ze hadn't made any sound, Jiang Hai Fu had no better option but to brace himself and continue, "Gu *dà ren* frequently couldn't sleep?"

"Yes." Xiang Jun sighed, sitting down on a chair to the side. "Gu *dà ren* apparently had frequent nightmares. I had to watch as *dà ren* fell ill. I even heard her speaking about having harmed too many people, babbling on and on about their names: something about a third prince, fourth prince, and there was also something else... Zuo Ning Yan? Aiya, I don't remember. Anyway, Gu *dà ren* was very pitiful..."

Floating beside the three people and hearing Xiang Jun reminisce about her, the somewhat touched Gu Hong Jian immediately felt foolish as a result.

Perfectly all right... perfectly all right..

This stupid Xiang Jun! Why did she mention Zuo Ning Yan?!

Jiang Hai Fu also immediately opened his eyes wide. He didn't know how he should respond. Even Lin Si Ze was unable to continue hiding and directly emerged from the trees' shadows.

Xiang Jun didn't anticipate that another person would appear from the shadows, giving her a fright. And when could clearly see who it was, she was even more frightened as she hurriedly knelt down. She exclaimed, "Long live your majesty the emperor! *Nú bì*<sup>4</sup> didn't, didn't see your majesty and didn't prompt greet your majesty. I plead for your majesty to forgive me!"

Lin Si Ze coldly sneered and said, "You can't sleep and like to sweep floors?"

"Eh?" Xiang Jun blankly raised her head.

Lin Si Ze continued, "From this day forth, you must light a lamp and sweep the floors within Zhao Hong Palace, Cheng Ze Palace, and Kong Ming Palace, every day for three months. I will send someone to inspect. If you have not swept the palaces clean, you will continue cleaning them for several months."

Xiang Jun collapsed and took a deep breath of cold air, but she saw Jiang Hai Fu give her a meaningful look about. Kneeling with a bitter face and kowtowing, she replied, "Thank you, your majesty."

Lin Si Ze flung his sleeves out and left, while Xiang Jun remained blankly kneeling on the ground. Jiang Hai Fu stared at Lin Si Ze's back and whispered, "You really are lucky."

Xiang Jun said, "Me, lucky?! I, I was blind and didn't see the emperor, so I must sweep for three months... and even sweep three areas. I am so lucky... *boo hoo...*"

Zhao Hong Palace was Gu Hong Jian's residence. It was always empty, with very few servants.

Cheng Ze Palace was the Empress's living area, but since Lin Si Ze had ascended the throne seven years ago, regardless of what the chancellor said, he had not declared an empress. Thus, it too remained empty, with very few

servants.

Kong Ming Palace, however, was a completely cold palace. The late emperor ordained during his reign that his imperial wives and concubines will enter and be buried alive with him. After Lin Si Ze ascended the throne, his harem was entirely empty. The number of imperial concubines he had could be counted on one hand. As a result, not many people would have a chance to enter the cold palace.

In other words, these three areas were uninhabited. They could even be described as desolate. Servants tasked with cleaning it merely did superficial work. They would, in all likelihood, have many years' worth of filth, especially Kong Ming Palace...

Making her clean these three areas...he was simply too formidable!

Jiang Hai Fu disagreed, "*Hn*, the emperor spared your life; that is already giving you special favor! Just remember, never make any irresponsible remarks about the three words 'Zuo Ning Yan' by all means. The next time you say it again, I'd reckon you must really want to be beheaded."

After he finished explaining, he scampered off like a little animal to catch up to Lin Si Ze, leaving Xiang Jun by herself as she sat blankly on the cold floor. At a loss, she mumbled, "Zuo Ning Yan?"

Gu Hong Jian still wanted to look back on her for much longer, but Lin Si Ze was already leaving Zhao Hong Palace.

Hearing the three words 'Zuo Ning Yan,' and seeing Lin Si Ze's reaction, her heart was empty.

Lin Si Ze then said, "Go to Zi Yun Palace," as he entered the huge chariot. After that, the party returned to Zi Yun Palace. He Fang Ning hadn't entertained the thought that Lin Si Ze would actually leave and then return, but she was happy despite not knowing the reason. Lin Si Ze indifferently asked her if nothing was wrong with her body. He Fang Ning hurriedly and repeatedly established that there was nothing majorly wrong. Lin Si Ze nodded and guided her into the palace.

Gu Hong Jian, frightened out of her mind, was pulled along inside. She

rejoiced, however, as it seemed that even though it was compulsory for her to stay in the same room as Lin Si Ze, she could still control the distance. She hid behind the outer screen, wanting to prevent herself from seeing or hearing anything.

But even if she truly couldn't see anything, she had no alternative but to hear them. She heard He Fang Ning whispering sweet nothings and the rustling of clothes.

Gu Hong Jian's face was expressionless as she heard that. Throughout this, she tried desperately to break her bonds and leave. It was probably because her heart was in too much turmoil, but she actually was managed to break out and leave.

Even though she was unable to leave Zi Yun Palace, she could at least leave the inner palace.

Gu Hong Jian floated out to the outer palace, subconsciously wiping her face with her hand, because she felt like she might cry. In the end, she only found out when she made to wipe her face—her hands unexpectedly passed through her own face just as her hand had passed through Lin Si Ze's face.

She really was very completely a soul, nothing came close. She was like a wisp of air, floating about neither here nor there, unable to do a thing. She couldn't even control her own whereabouts. She couldn't touch anything, not even herself. She couldn't cry either; she was simply forced to "live" in this empty manner, with her sight and hearing intact.

This must be retribution.

Why else would she be forced to see Lin Si Ze loving another woman even after her death? Seeing Lin Si Ze with another woman made her infuriated.

This must be Zuo Ning Yan's retribution.

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Author's Note: Spoiler – the male lead doesn't touch the second female.

I made you think——too fake, right?!

*Humph.* I think so!!! (Well there's a good reason behind this... --)

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1. (self-appellation of a lower-rank female) [↵](#)
2. *Níng* means ‘peace’ while *Fēi* means ‘imperial concubine’, so her official palace title is ‘Peaceful Imperial Concubine.’ It’s also a play on words as the last character in He Fang Ning’s name | 凝 | is pronounced identical to the | 寧 | in *Níng Fēi*.) [↵](#)
3. (literally means “adult,” general term used to refer to those of high status) [↵](#)
4. (means “slave-servant,” how a slave refers to themselves) [↵](#)

# Chapter 3

**Translator's Note: Warning, there is an implicit sex scene in this chapter, but it is *only* a flashback and merely *two lines* in length. It is preceded by footnote #18 and will be a bright pink in color. It is also *blurred* from view on default. Please do not complain about a lack of warning.**

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## Chapter 3 ... Assistant Minister, Assistant Minister—what exactly was an Assistant Minister?

Gu Hong Jian discovered that she apparently didn't need to go to sleep, so she waited for Lin Si Ze to finish his business with He Fang Ning. As the candle light extinguished, she wandered aimlessly inside He Fang Ning's palace hall.

It didn't matter if she was a ghost or a human, Gu Hong Jian's ability to recover wasn't bad.

To outsiders, Gu Hong Jian was the only female government official since the state's founding. She had overbearing power, and a dubious relationship with the emperor that couldn't be described. With her vicious methods, swift and decisive actions, resolution, and rare smiles, she was a textbook femme fatale with a tomboy nature. It was like her whole person was made of steel.

Only Gu Hong Jian herself and Lin Si Ze knew that Gu Hong Jian was in fact just an ordinary woman. She really strived to maintain her awe-inspiring reputation to outsiders, so she didn't laugh very much. Secretly, however, after getting to know people, she would cry and laugh very easily, crying at stories and laughing at non-ridiculous stories, so much so that even Lin Si Ze stroking her head would have her giggling for a very long time.

Gu Hong Jian's mood fluctuated because of Lin Si Ze as well, but Lin Si Ze always tormented her. It took her a long time for her ego to be able to recover from it.

It was pitch black. Unable to see clearly, she floated, lost in thought, not paying attention to the sky as it gradually brightened.

He Fang Ning and Lin Si Ze awakened. Lin Si Ze made himself presentable

and left early for the morning court. He Fang Ning was reluctant to part with him, hoping that Lin Si Ze would make promises such as “after the court session, I will come to see you,” and so forth. Lin Si Ze didn’t reply, however, and left.

Gu Hong Jian stuck her tongue out at the dazed He Fang Ning and followed Lin Si Ze when he left for the palace.

Lin Si Ze unexpectedly mentioned the Hu Prefecture during the morning court, asking General Sun if there was anything new to report. General Sun said, “Answering, your majesty the emperor. There still hasn’t been any news, but I believe it will come in the next few days.”

General Sun was originally Lin Si Ze’s most decorated high-ranking military officer. This Hu Prefecture business was also supposed to be his responsibility, but at the last moment, Gu Hong Jian took over. General Sun didn’t become resentful of her, only very concerned.

Lin Si Ze nodded at General Sun’s response.

Then, a man suddenly appeared, saying, “Your majesty the emperor, *wēi chén*<sup>1</sup> has a matter to report.”

Lin Si Ze said, “What’s the matter?”

Gu Hong Jian glanced quickly and discovered that the man was Zhao Yun Yuan. He was a famous scholar at Imperial Hanlin Academy<sup>2</sup>. After enduring a few more years, he would probably replace Imperial Secretary Zhou, who was rapidly losing the ability to hold a brush.

Zhao Yun Yuan said, “Assistant Minister Gu is a female when all is said and done. Although she has Vice General Wang to help, a heavy crisis could still occur. *Chén* thinks... perhaps some troops should be sent to assist Assistant Minister Gu.”

Gu Hong Jian listened and was rather surprised.

Zhao Yun Yuan was a very honest man.

Because of his honesty, he once made a report, impeaching Gu Hong Jian, and said that she had a venomous heart and was of an evil nature. Lin Si Ze had tossed the report to Gu Hong Jian to have a look, and she had glanced over it,



saying that Scholar Zhao was of good literary talent, indeed worthy of being the true Principal Scholar of the Golden Imperial Examinations<sup>3</sup>. This bastard was much better at behind the scene powerplays than her.

The second year after Lin Si Ze ascended to the throne, his relationship with Gu Hong Jian had eased somewhat.

Gu Hong Jian had forged an identity—Gu Hong<sup>4</sup>— and was able to pass the Imperial Examination, all the way up to the Palace Exams<sup>5</sup>. Only Lin Si Ze knew about this matter at that point. His calm and collected face didn't reveal anything. He instead straightforwardly anointed Gu Hong Jian on the spot as Principal Scholar. At the same time, there was an exam candidate who truly held a genuine aptitude that had everyone praising to the high heavens about. Lin Si Ze also rather enjoyed it. As a result, there was an unprecedented outcome of two Principal Scholars.

That tragic co-Principal Scholar was Zhao Yun Yuan. Thus, he unfavorably viewed Gu Hong Jian, who completely understood. Besides, Zhao Yun Yuan clearly wasn't bearing grudges against Gu Hong Jian. Instead he truly... viewed Gu Hong Jian unfavorably.

During the *Qiónglín* Feast<sup>6</sup>, Gu Hong Jian immediately clarified her identity, announcing that she was a woman. Everyone was terrified out of their wits, and Lin Si Ze's complexion turned dark. He didn't explain the matter, however, and just declared that now there was a female government official. In time, several officials attempted to impeach her, but Gu Hong Jian slowly resolved the backlash.

The voices that proclaimed Gu Hong Jian was a devious and evil official never ceased, but Gu Hong Jian didn't pay any attention to this. The officials she eliminated all had one commonality; they were detrimental to Lin Si Ze.

After assuming the position as a female Principal Scholar, for the past several years, she had been sinking and floating among the bureaucracy. Gu Hong Jian could no longer find a government official who was closer to Lin Si Ze than she was. Everyone knew that she was Lin Si Ze's confidant, his right-hand man.

During the previous dynasty, the censorate<sup>7</sup> had become a decoration. From the Senior Imperial Censor<sup>8</sup>, to the provincial governors<sup>9</sup>, and even the investigating censors<sup>10</sup>—none of them had very strong characters, and very few people even dared to speak. Since Lin Si Ze’s ascension, Gu Hong Jian once again began eliminating people who challenged Lin Si Ze. Nowadays, the censorate seemingly resembled an empty shelf.

Although Gu Hong Jian’s methods were cruel, they were rather effective. Moreover, the censorate didn’t have any capable people. In time, there were less people who tried to impeach her. Everyone saw Lin Si Ze’s resolute manner and had no other choice but to accept this peculiar woman who stood among them during morning court.

What a pity that she wasn’t male. That time with the Golden List<sup>11</sup> and her step-by-step ascension could not have been achieved without tricks—really, how could she become the Assistant Minister within seven years? That Zhao Yun Yuan still hadn’t become an Imperial Secretary after seven years, still merely Scholar Zhao while Gu Hong Jian was already an Assistant Minister.

Those people flattered and fawned over Gu Hong Jian when in her presence, but behind her back, they secretly spoke malicious words about her. Some of these words reached Gu Hong Jian’s ear, but she realized that she couldn’t refute them.

At first she was livid, but later on she no longer cared. Looking at the slow and stupid-looking Zhao Yun Yuan’s letter of impeachment, she could only smile and compliment the good penmanship.

Gu Hong Jian also thoroughly understood her destestable nature, but she didn’t anticipate Zhao Yun Yuan to actually be rather concerned for her... Well, from a different perspective, he basically had no faith in Gu Hong Jian’s capability...

Just after Zhao Yun Yuan finished his statement, another person appeared and said, “Assistant Minister Gu is full of stratagems. In all likelihood, there are no problems. Why should Zhao *dàren* be worried?”

Gu Hong Jian looked at this man with disdain. She couldn’t help snorting—

even if the other person couldn't hear her at all.

This man was currently Head of the Supreme Court<sup>12</sup>. With such a position, he would seem to be rather old, but he was actually Gu Hong Jian's age. Although his features were naturally excellent, it led to a shrewd and arrogant aura, making others look at him and purposely avoid any further association with him.

He had been able to assume the position of Head of the Supreme Court, and aside from his capabilities, what was even more important was actually his family name—Zuo. His name was Zuo Ning Hao.

It was precisely the famous son of Minister Zuo, who had now retired from court and was passing his days idly at home, that he had in his later years. He was Zuo Ning Yan's younger brother. It was said that he was born later than Zuo Ning Yan by only two to three minutes.

He and Gu Hong Jian loathed each other. Thus, for him to speak out like this, Gu Hong Jian wasn't the least bit surprised. She only felt that this man was exceedingly childish.

Lin Si Ze's gaze swept past Zhao Yun Yuan over to Zuo Ning Hao. He only said, "This matter will wait for news from Hu Prefecture before a decision is made."

In simpler terms, he wouldn't agree or disagree, but he had given a reply. Zhao Yun Yuan's voice of "agreement" ceased while Zuo Ning Hao shot a glance towards Zhao Yun Yuan, who was also silent.

Nothing major happened after that, so Gu Hong Jian floated around, hoping that one of them could see her. Unfortunately, the imperial court proceeded as usual. She wasn't able to make out any expression of terror or awe on any of the imperial court members' faces.

Nevertheless, no one could see her.

—If someone could see her, Gu Hong Jian wanted it to be Zuo Ning Hao because she believed this guy would immediately die of fright.

Once the morning passed, Lin Si Ze immediately returned to Wen Dao Tang. He corrected his accounts book.<sup>13</sup> Meanwhile, Jiang Hai Fu allowed servants to

deliver some light refreshments. Lin Si Ze didn't meet anyone at all. At noon, he stopped to eat a meal alone and took a nap afterwards. He then went to the imperial garden for a walk and to practice martial arts. Finally, he returned to his office and corrected his accounts book.

Gu Hong Jian followed by Lin Si Ze's side from morning to evening, suddenly realizing that Lin Si Ze's life was in fact outstandingly boring and dull.

Moreover, Lin Si Ze clearly didn't particularly enjoy this lifestyle. As the day ended, Gu Hong Jian stared blankly as she couldn't see Lin Si Ze's smile at all.

Apart from his midday chat with Imperial Secretary Zhou<sup>14</sup>, Lin Si Ze didn't see anyone else that day.

It seemed that Lin Si Ze was actually very pitiful...

Gu Hong Jian's pity towards Lin Si Ze vanished later that evening. He Fang Ning probably saw Lin Si Ze go to her place yesterday, so today, she had gathered her courage and arrived at Wen Dao Tang, saying that she had made some light pastries and soup. Lin Si Ze met with her, failing to comment on her lack of etiquette. He didn't seem very happy as he had her return first to Zi Yun Palace.

'First' — this word suggested that Lin Si Ze would follow her later, so He Fang Ning was unable to contain her joy. She still stifled as much of it as she could, only exposing a captivating blush on her cheeks as she said, "Your majesty the emperor, *chén qiè* will return first with nothing to do. *Chén qiè* believes it would be better for *chén qiè* to stay here to accompany your majesty."

Lin Si Ze glanced at her and responded, "Then you can grind the inkstick for me instead of him."

To the side was a young palace eunuch grinding the inkstick, his eyes seemingly on the verge of closing. He Fang Ning smiled. She didn't dislike grinding the inkstick, despite the coarse and monotonous work. Raising her sleeve lightly, she used her pure white, slim jade fingers to pinch the end of the inkstick and began grinding it softly against the inkstone.

This scene of a beautiful wife accompanying her scholar husband in his studies made Gu Hong Jian roll her eyes greatly. She didn't simmer like last night,

however, as there was currently nothing to get angry about.

He Fang Ning grinded half the inkstick before suddenly saying , “This is the first time Fang Ning has grinded an inkstick. Don’t take offense, your majesty the emperor, if the grinding is no good...”

Lin Si Ze said, “Very well.”

Pausing from his work, he continued, “There is a large difference between you and someone else; by now, the inkstone would have broke.”

He Fang Ning blanked out, turning her head to the side to look at the young palace eunuch. The young palace eunuch stared back innocently at them, later shaking his head and trembling with fear. —May the heavens have mercy on him, for he had never spilled a single drop of ink or caused it to splash before!

Floating to the small group’s side, Gu Hong Jian stared blankly at them.

The person Lin Si Ze spoke of should... No, it was definitely her.

That was in the 3rd year of Píngchāng. Lin Si Ze had ascended to the throne in the 4th year while she went to live in Zhao Hong Palace.

Before that, she and Lin Si Ze held heavily conflicting views, and this was the first time they unexpectedly had difficulty reconciling with each other. Not only did they reconcile, but they also became more intimate compared to before. That time, He Fang Ning did not appear by Lin Si Ze’s side. The only woman for him was Gu Hong Jian.

At the same time, Gu Hong Jian began unceasingly rising in the government ranks, all the way up to Assistant Minister. Lin Si Ze, for the most part, felt that the title Assistant Minister was rather ambiguous.

Assistant Minister, Assistant Minister—what exactly was an Assistant Minister?

Therefore, he didn’t allow her to rise in rank again. Only later did the two of them have a real lover’s quarrel. Lin Si Ze intended for her to move into the palace. Gu Hong Jian disagreed, saying that she was afraid that others would say Lin Si Ze was an incapable ruler because he was dallying with a government official. Lin Si Ze argued, however, that he was merely giving her his residence he

resided in when he was a prince, De Ze Palace;<sup>15</sup> the name had just been changed to Zhao Hong Palace. Gu Hong Jian who suffered from not having a place to live immediately agreed.

Zhao Hong Palace, Shao Hong Palace, he told her to go to live there.<sup>16</sup> Since she was a child, she had obediently listened to Lin Si Ze's summons every time.

Let alone De Ze Palace, which was his second residence when he was a prince, his first residence was Bai Fu Palace. Because it was in the most remote area, the place was absolutely empty. His second palace also held a lot of memories for the two of them. Gu Hong Jian could do nothing but accept.

It only seemed like Gu Hong Jian lived outside the palace in a mansion on Vermilion Bird Street. Every day, she would pretend to leave the imperial court with the others before riding a small palanquin back to the chambers of imperial concubines. This way, it failed to create a huge problem.

In the 3rd Year of Píngchāng, Gu Hong Jian was still somewhat uncomfortable. By the 4th Year of Píngchāng, she was completely accustomed to life in the harem. The entire harem also knew who she was. Although she didn't have the status of an imperial concubine, she was nevertheless the only woman the emperor loved and visited. With the government officials, however, the two could not allow any of them to realize that Lin Si Ze highly regarded Gu Hong Jian.

Thereupon after the 4th Year of Píngchāng, Gu Hong Jian acted freely and unrestrained within the harem. Sometimes, she would even surreptitiously slip away to Wen Dao Tang to find Lin Si Ze.

At that time, Lin Si Ze would be very busy, perhaps even more busy than he was in the present, as he was always checking imperial reports or conversing matters with the chancellor.

Although Gu Hong Jian was Assistant Minister, she was too young to take care of all of China. The scope of her vision was very small, confined only to the person known as Lin Si Ze. She only wanted to help Lin Si Ze with his worries and difficulties. As a result, Lin Si Ze required her to think over the topic of her residence before he would allow her to decide.

Thus, after a long time, Gu Hong Jian didn't manage anything. For the matters happening in front of her, she could only beg to have them taken care of.

Because she dreaded coming across the other chancellor in Wen Dao Tang, Gu Hong Jian would always appear outside Wen Dao Tang. She would then exchange looks with Jiang Hai Fu. If Jiang Hai Fu had a smile on his face and nodded, that meant there was no one present. She could then brazenly enter. If Jiang Hai Fu shook his head, she needed to make a quiet escape

If she could enter, she would rush in without the slightest hesitation. At first, she gave Lin Si Ze a scare, startling him and nearly causing him to toss his writing brush at her. Upon seeing that it was her, he steadied his grip on the nearly tossed writing brush and asked, "Why are you here?"

In the beginning, Gu Hong Jian would giggle happily and say something nonsensical. She would later keep him company and pick up imperial reports to review along with him.

In truth, this was a disgraceful affair, but Lin Si Ze didn't seem to mind. Gu Hong Jian was even more unconscientious. She would grab the imperial reports, speak of matters that were not her business, and jeer at Commander Zheng's typos. She would even speak of how Imperial Secretary Zhou was difficult to deal with. Her words at this age were still vigorous and energetic. Occasionally, she would assess a few imperial reports, but she would only complain about how it was a 'bullshit report' or full of 'graceful words and flowery speech.'<sup>17</sup>

Lin Si Ze didn't feel like she was truthful, but he wasn't troubled by her and continued to ascertain his accounts book.

Later on, Lin Si Ze was completely accustomed to having a sneaky individual enter Wen Dao Tang, grab his imperial reports to begin recklessly criticizing their contents, and even fall asleep, almost drooling onto the imperial reports.

Upon returning from her dreamland, Gu Hong Jian woke up and found herself on the soft couch in Wen Dao Tang with a brilliant yellow quilt covering her. She looked around distractedly, remembered that it was definitely Lin Si Ze who relocated her, and immediately felt a bit embarrassed. She then ran outside where Lin Si Ze was, as expected, evaluating the imperial reports.

Gu Hong Jian leaned against the wall and said, “Oh, I fell asleep...?”

Lin Si Ze glanced at her and without a word, the meaningful look in his eyes expressed basically, “If not, what else?”

Gu Hong Jian said, “I was resting my upper body on the table and unconsciously... *yi*, how did I end up on the soft couch? *Aiya*, Si Ze, did you carry me there?!”

Lin Si Ze returned her blunt statement by not looking at her as she happily exclaimed, “Si Ze, you really do care!”

In private, Gu Hong Jian would call Lin Si Ze ‘Si Ze,’ and he would also call her ‘Hong Jian.’ In front of others, they would call each other ‘your majesty the emperor’ and ‘*ài qīng*.’<sup>18</sup>



When Gu Hong Jian climaxed in bed with Lin Si Ze, however, she would breathlessly cry out “your majesty.” This caused the vigorous Lin Si Ze to lose his breath as his movements became even more fierce and powerful before he finally released into Gu Hong Jian’s body.



Gu Hong Jian recalled fondly of Lin Si Ze’s expertise. She remembered how she demanded to help him by grinding the ink stone.

Gu Hong Jian returned each time to see that Lin Si Ze had the young palace eunuch grinding the inkstick outside. Lin Si Ze once in awhile shouted for the palace eunuch to enter to switch out inksticks. Upon seeing how little of the inkstick was left, Lin Si Ze nodded in approval before allowing her to grind the rest.

In fact, Gu Hong Jian had never grinded an inkstick. Since she was a child, she would rather dance with blades and brandish spears. She had never served Lin Si Ze by grinding inksticks in her childhood. To the contrary, Lin Si Ze would teach her how to write characters and help her by grinding the inksticks as well. To pass the imperial examination later on, she persistently studied yet still had someone by her side to serve her and grind the ink for her. So, the first time she personally grinded an inkstick, she failed.



Gu Hong Jian began writing small characters with the inkstick as she was grinding, only to discover that she wasn't grinding a lot of ink after a long time. She assumed that since the inkstick hadn't snapped in half, she could grind with more pressure.

As she was a martial artist, her hands were not weak. She was strong enough to poke a hole in the inkstone, unexpectedly causing the entire inkstone to stand upright before breaking in half.

Ink drenched her hand and Lin Si Ze's clothes, splashing out and splattering both of their faces.

Lin Si Ze was speechless.

Gu Hong Jian immediately panicked and reached out to wipe the ink off of Lin Si Ze's face but forgot that her own hand was even dirtier. Thereupon, the serious Lin Si Ze's face became quite black.

Gu Hong Jian was dumbstruck. She really couldn't control herself and laughed loudly. Lin Si Ze was silent for a moment before also reaching out to suddenly pinch her face—his hand had long ago been dirty with ink.

Gu Hong Jian couldn't avoid it, so she smiled and allowed him to play with her face. Surprisingly, Lin Si Ze wasn't able to control himself and chuckled. Gu Hong Jian mockingly glared at Lin Si Ze, whose face was black. This, however, made her ordinary face adorable and funny. The two of them looked at each other, and after a while, Lin Si Ze held Gu Hong Jian's chin. Neither of them minded getting dirty. Gu Hong Jian closed her eyes, accepting Lin Si Ze's kiss as her heart softened immensely.

After a long time, Lin Si Ze released Gu Hong Jian. Gu Hong Jian rested her head against his chest while breathing deeply, conveniently grabbing his clothes and making them dirtier. Lin Si Ze held her hand and remarked, "Clumsy."

Gu Hong Jian didn't have any way to retort and merely extended her head up to lightly nip at Lin Si Ze's chin.

Lin Si Ze lowered his head to look at her with deep eyes. After that, he called for someone to clean up, taking Gu Hong Jian with him to bathe. Zhao Hong Palace had an enormous bath. Lin Si Ze tossed her in and he quickly

followed. The two of them helped each other wash their face. They then wandered lower...

Gu Hong Jian was a little embarrassed, but Lin Si Ze didn't seem to be blushing with shame at all. He only embraced Gu Hong Jian and helped her thoroughly wash herself in the bath. In the end, Gu Hong Jian was carried out in his arms princess-style, her face red and unable to look at the gentleman.

After that incident, Gu Hong Jian didn't dare to help Lin Si Ze grind inksticks.

With the vivid and sweet memory in her mind, Gu Hong Jian's spirit returned to the present, her gaze falling onto the flawless He Fang Ning, who was bowing her head to review and correct Lin Si Ze's imperial reports. She sighed lightly.

She didn't qualify for this position, so someone finally took it.

Gu Hong Jian observed that the two of them intended to have a sweet night<sup>19</sup>. To her surprise, however, Lin Si Ze made He Fang Ning leave and promptly went to his study to sleep for the night.

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Author's Note:

If you are unable to endure my diabolicalness, don't look to cause trouble! Although I think I am not very diabolical, I see that I have esteemed readers who say that I am quite terrifyingly diabolical because of my writing. I'm not! I'm under pressure as big as a ripe white pear<sup>20</sup> QAQ

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1. (this small official/humble servant— |*wēi*| meaning 'small' and |*chén*| meaning 'servant' which is used when addressing the sovereign) ↩
2. ( an academic and administrative institution where membership in the academy was confined to an elite group of scholars, who performed secretarial and literary tasks for the court) ↩
3. ( |状元| or |zhuàngyuan| is the title given to the scholar who achieved the highest score on highest level of the Chinese imperial examinations. |金

科| is a compound abbreviation of |金| and |科舉|, |金| referring to the golden lists that successful scholars are listed on upon passing the exams and |科舉| the imperial examinations, which were a civil service examination system in Imperial China to select candidates for the state bureaucracy.) ↵

4. (The characters of the fake identity |顾弘| is homophonous to the characters |顾虹| of her name Gu Hong Jian) ↵
5. (Diànshì |殿試, “court exam” | were held every three years in the Imperial palace and often supervised by the emperor himself, the highest level of examination where only a select number of qualifying scholars could take.) ↵
6. (feast hosted by the emperor for successful candidates of the imperial examination) ↵
7. (high-level supervisory agency, a branch of the centralized bureaucracy, paralleling the Six Ministries and the five Chief Military Commissions, and was directly responsible to the emperor) ↵
8. (Second only to the Prime Minister, in charge of impeachment, maintaining order, and managing of official records) ↵
9. (an official either elected or appointed to be the chief administrator of law throughout one or more of the many provinces constituting the nation) ↵
10. (Censorate official in imperial China’s civil bureaucracy in charge of investigations and impeachment) ↵
11. (|金榜| or “jīnbǎng” literally means “tablet with inscription in gold.” It is the pass list for the top imperial examinations, the roll of honor.) ↵
12. (It is actually the Dali Temple, which is essentially equivalent to the US Supreme Court. To be head of the Dali Temple/Supreme Court is to be head of the judicial system) ↵
13. (an accounts book is a booklet in accordion form with a slipcase, used for keeping accounts, etc.) ↵
14. (Imperial Secretary, a title in reference to status as a member of the Hanlin Imperial Academy) ↵
15. (|泽| in De Ze Palace is the same character for ‘Ze’ in the name Lin Si Ze. |德泽| itself is a phrase/idiom meaning ‘Grace’ or ‘Virtuous Benefactor,’ very ironic considering Lin Si Ze’s character. The authoress also loves wordplay since |德| is pronounced |dé| while |的|, a character that signifies a

possessive, is pronounced |de| —very arrogant of Lin Si Ze, isn't it, for him to reside in a palace practically announcing that it is his?) ↵

16. (|召| is a character for summoning and is a character that makes up |昭|, the first character, 'Zhao,' in Zhao Hong Palace. The authoress is playing on the linguistics of the language and the phonetic similarity between the characters as well to convey the idea 'I summon you' or 'I command you') ↵
17. (|花言巧语| is an idiom in Chinese that literally means “graceful words, flowery speech.” Figuratively speaking, GHJ is complaining about how the report is made up of “elegant but insincere words” or “dishonest rhetoric”) ↵
18. (...this is how the emperor addresses his concubines.) ↵
19. (slang term— “sweet night” is normally where the woman asks a man to spend the night with her, knowing full well that she would be kicking him out of bed the next morning. AKA the woman propositions the man for a one night stand, forcing him out of bed the next morning. In this case, it would be the opposite as it would be LSZ kicking out HFN) ↵
20. (压力山大 is an abbreviated idiom of “压力(像)山(一样)大”, and “像...一样” which means “the pressure is as high as the mountain.” yā lì shān dà |鸭梨山大| is pronounced nearly the same except for the tones of 力 and 梨; it is actually used as a humorous variation of the former idiom. The authoress decided to use 好 (good) here to indicate that the pear is ripe... either that or she messed up the idiom.) ↵